

H.M.S. PINAFORE

On Saturday 23rd February 2008, I was pleased to be invited to review Reading Operatic Society's latest presentation 'H.M.S. Pinafore', being one of my favourite G&S Operas. I have reviewed this show many times but I think I can say this was probably the best that I have seen. To start with it is a good indication that this is a successful society when they can put some 49 members in the production, this filled the large hexagon stage with movement and colour. It had magnificent costumes with an excellent set. All principals had been well selected and characterised in their various roles and movement and choreography could not be faulted. When one considers that the society lost a months rehearsal due to change of dates by the Hexagon this was a considerable achievement.

Iain Whittaker – (SIR JOSEPH PORTER KCB – First Lord of the Admiralty) – Iain presented Sir Joseph Porter in true Gilbertian fashion. This was an excellent portrayal of which Gilbert would have been proud. Every facet of the character was spot-on, movement, delivery and singing could not be faulted – a superb performance.

Jeff Trim – (Captain Corcoran – Commanding H.M.S. Pinafore) – Jeff is normally seen in the tenor roles so it was good to see him taking on a high baritone character. As the captain of H.M.S. Pinafore I could not fault his portrayal. He displayed a commanding presence for his crew but was obsequious when in the presence of Sir Joseph Porter, all well portrayed. He lent his excellent singing voice to that lovely solo at the opening of the second act 'Fair Moon', beautifully sung.

Simon Hutson – (RALPH RACKSTRAW – Able Seaman) – I was concerned to hear that you had lost your voice at the start of the production so when I arrived on the Saturday I was delighted to hear that your voice was back and it was a very good tenor voice with good phrasing and projection. Your movements about the stage were confident and you presented just the right character of Ralph Rackstraw. Your rapport with Josephine was also well presented – Well done.

Keith Lawrence - (DICK DEADEYE – ABLE SEAMAN) - I have always said that this is a wonderful character to play but it can be painful sustaining the deformity which you did very well. Your make-up and characterisation was first-class. Your excellent singing voice came to the fore in the duet 'Kind Captain' and your musical interjections in the first act finale were precise – Well done.

Andrew Philips – (BILL BOBSTAY – Boatswain's Mate)

Daniel Powell - (BOB BECKETT – Carpenter's Mate) – These two minor roles were well filled by Andrew and Daniel presenting just the right characters and precisely singing the trio with Ralph, 'A British Tar', a good balance of voices, well projected.

Suzannah Brooksbank – (JOSEPHINE – The Captain's Daughter) – This young lady certainly has a lot of potential and should go far. She is attractive, has good stage presence and moves well about the stage. She has a good acting ability and presented the role of Josephine correctly. Her diction and projection was of a high standard and she exhibited a pleasant, true and accurate singing voice. Just one small point – try not to force your top notes, although the sound is accurate they tend to sound a little shrill – congratulations on your debut with Reading Operatic Society and I look forward to seeing more of you in the future.

Jenny Gumbrell – (HEBE – Sir Joseph's First Cousin) – This part is a minor role in the cast of principals, but nevertheless an important one and Jennie made it her own and ensured she remained the Sea Lord's first cousin attempting to keep him on the straight and narrow – Well done.

Maggie Preston - (Mrs CRIPPS [Little Buttercup] – A Portsmouth Bumboat Woman) – Over the many years I have known Maggie she has always given a good performance for the many characters she has portrayed and this was no exception. Maggie entered fully into this role with an authentic accent for the speaking voice and which was carried through to the singing voice, something which is not easy to achieve. A faultless performance.

Chorus of First Lord's Sisters, Cousins, Aunts and Sailors - It is unusual to see a society on stage with a chorus of forty members, and what a chorus. The singing had quality making a wonderful sound. They filled the stage with movement and colour and executed the

HMS PINAFORE The Hexagon. Reading

Reading Operatic Society presented this popular Gilbert and Sullivan operetta at The Hexagon last week and as well as having an excellent number of principal singers to call on the Society is fortunate to have a large tuneful chorus, making the show a musical delight from beginning to end.

The curtain rose to reveal the men's chorus busily cleaning the ship's deck - and to see such a large number of men in a production was a bonus in itself. However, the spectacle really took off when the ladies' chorus joined them. Resplendent in red, white and blue dresses, they filled the stage with a riot of colour, complementing the attractive set depicting a nineteenth century Royal Navy vessel. The storyline pokes fun at the snobbery that existed between upper and lower class society. and until the final revelations by Little Buttercup the Bumboat Woman (Maggie Preston), the prospect of a marriage between the common sailor Ralph Rackstraw (Simon Hutson) and the Captain's daughter Josephine (Suzannah Brooksbank) looked decidedly bleak. Sir Joseph Porter (skilfully portrayed by Iain Whittaker) was forced to revise his own marriage plans when he found that his intended was certainly not sufficiently highly born to match the self-inflated opinions he had of himself, left him no choice but to select Hebe (Jenny Gumbrell) as his bride from the bevy of cousins that accompanied him wherever he went. Captain Corcoran (Jeff Trim), Dick Deadeye (Keith Lawrence). Bill Bobstay (Andrew Phillips) and Bob Beckett (Daniel Powell) completed the ship's company's principal lineup.

Many past reviews of productions at The Hexagon have included adverse comments on sound reproduction., it is only fair therefore, to compliment the sound engineer when things go right as they did in this delightful production by Jill Morgan.

Claire Brooks

choreographic routines with precision – Congratulations.

Jill Morgan - (Producer & Choreographer) - What can I say Jill? – A super show, well cast, beautifully dressed, well staged, together with brilliant choreography and when one considers that you lost a month in rehearsals due to the Hexagon, this was a major achievement – Congratulations, one of the best ‘Pinafores’ I have seen.

John Lawes - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) – Once again John had gathered around him a fine set of musicians who played the music sympathetically and with a good tone and balance. Chorus members and principals had been well rehearsed in the music making an excellent sound with good balance of voices and accurate entries.

Stage Manager & Crew – This is probably one of the easier shows for stage crew requiring just the one set. That said it appeared a well managed stage.

Lighting Design & Operation – This is a fairly easy show to light, but that said, it has to be done correctly to ensure the right atmosphere is generated on stage. This lighting design met all the necessary criteria in this respect and the operation on the night of my visit could not be faulted.

Sound – How nice it is to hear the human voice as God intended without being distorted with over-amplification. This show did have amplification supplied by strategically placed mikes about the stage area and ensured a good balance of voices but at the same time I could hear every word which was spoken and sung and proves to me that providing the performers project correctly and the sound desk is operated correctly, the use of radio mikes are unnecessary – Well done.

Costumes – What a wonderful set of costumes, the ladies had been very well designed with a red, white and blue theme, they looked new and fitted well and certainly added colour to the show. The mens costumes were equally spectacular denoting well the various positions on board the ship.

Scenery – this was a super set supplied by **Scenic & Property Hire**. It made a pleasant change to see that the deck was shown fore and aft which is not generally the norm. it had been well painted with excellent perspective. It also looked clean and new.

Props – All the props used fitted the periods and action on stage, just one small point, the mops used on the deck looked far too clean as if they had never been used and were certainly too clean for a man-of-war of the period.

Make-up – This aspect had been well thought out with all the correct character make-up on the principals, in particular ‘Dick Deadeye’ and ‘Sir Joseph Porter’. Make-up on the chorus was good and stood up well under the lighting.

Programme – This was a most attractive programme with a well designed, colourful and eye-catching cover which was continued on the back cover with some descriptive illustrations. It contained all the relevant information with items of interest, all printed on good quality paper. This deserves to be entered for the NODA Programme Competition.

Front of House – As always with this society, Front of House staff were on hand to look after their audience. They were smartly dressed and easily identifiable.

Thank you for inviting me to what I consider, one of the finest Pinafore’s I have seen in a long time and for your excellent hospitality. I would like to wish you all success with your next presentation.

Henry Hawes – NODA Representative – Region 13

HMS PINAFORE

The Hexagon

Reading Operatic Society ‘s production of this popular work by Gilbert and Sullivan certainly lived up to the claim that they are the leading exponents of Savoy Operas in the area. From the rousing opening number, performed by a chorus of eighteen male singers through the solos and duets of the principals and the delightful red, white and blue spectacle created when the ladies of the chorus came on board in their colourful costumes, the show was quality all the way. Making her debut performance with the Society (although no stranger to The Hexagon stage), Suzannali Brooksbank, (Josephine) charmed us with her clear soprano voice and was the perfect foil to Simoii Hutson (Ralpli Rackstraw). Performances from stalwarts Maggie Preston (Buttercup), Jeff Trim (Captain Corcoran) and Keith Lawrence (Dick Deadeye) ensured these roles became real characters and Ian Whittaker (Sir Joseph Porter) brought his inimitable touches to the comedy timing of the role. Completing the principal line-up, crew members Aiidrew Plilips (Bill Bobstay) and Daniel Powell (Bob Beckett) convinced us of the importance of being an Englishman, whilst Jenny Gumbrell (Hebe) set out steadfastly to win the heart of the Admiralty’s First Lord!

Musical Director Johii Lawes ensured his large orchestra sympathetically accompanied the musical numbers. This memorable performance was in the safe hands of Producer and Choreographer Jill Morgans.

John Cook